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LA FERNE
By Auguste Renoir

A SEVERE LOSS TO THE ART WORLD

When Edward F. Searles, in February 1893, deeded to the regents of the University of California the great Mark Hopkins mansion on historic "Nob Hill" in San Francisco, for use as an Art Museum, he little dreamed that a terrible disaster would completely destroy both the building and its contents; thus robbing the Pacific Coast of its most important art possession. In its elevated position every window of the building, as well as its broad verandas commanded a magnificent view of the busy thoroughfares of the city, of the bay and shipping, the outlying islands, and the towns on the opposite shores. By day it presented a superb panorama, while at night the myriads of dancing lights with misty shadows suggested an Arabian Night's vision. The structure was unfortunately not in esthetic harmony with its admirable vista; architecturally it was inartistic and commonplace, though of vast proportions. The interior decorations were extremely ornate, of the most exaggerated style of a generation ago. The display of rare woods, however, was wonderful, and the carvings very elaborate and

beautifully executed. In the great halls and chambers ebony, rosewood cocobolas, pear, and elm had been employed in a more lavish manner than ever before attempted. For its final purpose the large drawing-rooms and galleries were essentially well fitted; with high ceilings and an abundance of light, they proved very suitable to the exhibition of works of art.

By the additional gift of the "Mary Frances Searles Gallery," in 1899,

had been provided an appropriate place in which special exhibitions might be held; the art school had previous to this been transferred to a separate home constructed in the rear of the main building. Liberally endowed by the donor, the Institute was the rendezvous of the art lovers of the entire Pacific Coast. In addition to all these munificent gifts, Mr. Searles continued to show his constant interest by annually enriching the Museum with paintings of value. He had already contributed, among a great many other canvases from celebrated artists here and abroad, such renowned works as Gérôme's "Call to Prayer," Benjamin-Constant's "The Captives," and De Haas's "Storm off the Coast."

Emulating the example of the founder, Collis P. Huntington, Hon. James D. Phelan, and others, had generously presented a number of rare



PORTRAIT
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and interesting paintings by early California artists. These, together with Mrs. Benjamin P. Avery's collection, formed a valuable representation of the work of Thomas Hill, the veteran painter of the Yosemite; Tavernier Brookes, William Keith, Julian Rix, and Jules Pages who was the first "native son" pupil of the Mark Hopkins Institute to receive the highest honors of the Paris Salon. Toby Rosenthal, Alexander Harrison, and Humphrey Moore, the celebrated deaf-mute painter, with many lesser lights of the Western firmament of art had found a place within its shrine.

Important in artistic value were the paintings loaned by Miss Jennie C. Bull, among which were "Sunset on the Seine" by Iwill, "Return from Pasture" by Brissot, "Return from the Hunt" by Kowalski, "Land-

scape" by Corot, and "Forest" by Rousseau. The canvases belonging to Miss Sarah M. Spooner were also of great importance, representing Jacque, Van Marcke, Mauve, Roybet, Gallegos, Leloir, Corot, and Shreyer. Mrs. Horace Davis had exhibited a splendid "Sunset" by Edward Moran, and "Sheep" by Verbockhoven. In the English Gothic dining-hall were displayed the ceramics, Indian baskets, and curios. In the large exhibition room a number of recent paintings were temporarily on view, while the school-rooms were adorned with plaster casts of unusual excellence, which were presented to the city of San Francisco by the French government as a token of appreciation for her munificent donations to the Red Cross Society of France during the war of 1871.

Of all these priceless treasures, there remains nothing but ashes, and a few casts that some well meaning but indiscriminating friend of art rescued at the risk of his life. The enthusiastic work of the old Art Association, organized in 1872, the generous gifts of the founder and other liberal citizens became the prey of the flames, and in a few minutes were lost in a sea of fire which, fanned by a violent wind, swept over Nob Hill, destroying not only the Institute, but the magnificent private collections as well. The leading artists' studios, with their entire contents, were also consumed before anything could be saved, for the "Latin Quarter," nestling at the foot of the great hill, was the first section of the city to be wrecked by earthquake and devastated by fire. To San Franciscans, always great lovers of the beautiful, the loss is especially severe. While, in years to come, the Museum may be rebuilt, as a crowning glory to the new city already rising from its ashes, the work of the eminent artists, long since gone to their rest, can never be duplicated, however bountiful may be the generosity of its art patrons.

HECTOR ALLIOT.

